

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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R 270703Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7904
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
CINCPAC
USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 0583

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, MILI, BG
SUBJ: M.F.A. APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION IN THE SUB CONTINENT

SUMMARY. ON OCCASION OF A COURTESY CALL BY CINCPAC
ADM. WEISNER AND SENIOR STAFF, ACCOMPANIED BY CHARGE
AND DEFATT, BANGLADESH FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSSAIN
GAVE A COMPREHENSIVE BRIEFING ON HOW THE MFA VIEWS THE
CURRENT SITUATION IN THE SUB-CONTINENT. HIS PRESENTATION
WAS LOW-KEY, EVEN-HANDED, AND WELL ORGANIZED. HE REFLECTED
CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE AREA AND SPOKE
FAVORABLY OF INDIA'S NEW POSTURE IN THE SUB-CONTINENT
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(THOUGH CAUTIOUS IN HIS EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE).
HE DID NOT DEAL WITH BANGLADESH-U.S. RELATIONS DIRECTLY.
HE WAS BEARISH ABOUT ANY NEAR-TERM ECONOMIC GROUPING
IN THE SUB-CONTINENT. FULL MEMCON BEING SUBMITTED
SEPARATELY. END SUMMARY.

1. TABARAK BEGAN WITH AN OVERVIEW OF EVENTS IN THE

SUB-CONTINENT SINCE 1947. FOLLOWING BANGLADESH'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1971, THE INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONSHIP WAS ONE OF INDIAN DOMINANCE, AND THIS CONTINUED UNTIL THE OVERTHROW OF SHEIKH MUJIB IN AUGUST 1975. PRESIDENT ZIA'S GOVERNMENT, WHICH CAME TO POWER IN NOVEMBER, WAS "MORE NATIONALISTIC AND KEEN TO END ANY SUBSERVIENCE." INDIA REACTED BY TRAINING AND SUPPORTING ANTI-BDG FORCES, A SITUATION WHICH CONTINUED UNTIL INDIRA'S DEFEAT AT THE POLLS.

2. TABARAK NOTED THAT THE DESAI GOVERNMENT SEEMED COMMITTED TO IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH ALL ITS NEIGHBORS AND HAD FOREGONE SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO INTERFERE IN PAKISTAN, SRI LANKA, ETC. THE BORDER CAMPS HOUSING ANTI-BDG "MISCREANTS" HAD GRADUALLY BEEN DISMANTLED AND ABOUT 1,000 OF THESE PEOPLE HAD RETURNED TO BANGLADESH AND SURRENDERED. A SHORT-TERM FARAKKA AGREEMENT, ON DIVISION OF THE GANGES WATERS, HAD BEEN REACHED. ON THE WHOLE THE SITUATION IN THE SUB-CONTINENT WAS BETTER THAN IT HAD EVER BEEN DURING THE PAST THIRTY YEARS. TABARAK DOUBTED THAT INDIA'S POLICY OF PREEMINENCE HAD BEEN ABANDONED, BUT IT WAS NOW POSSIBLE TO NEGOTIATE WITH INDIA.

3. TABARAK CHARACTERIZED PRESIDENT ZIA'S RECENT VISITS TO NEPAL, INDIA, AND PAKISTAN AS AN "INITIATIVE FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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DETENTE" AND BELIEVED THESE TRIPS HAD CONTRIBUTED TO AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCREASING COOPERATION IN THE SUB-CONTINENT.

4. AS TO THE INDIAN OCEAN, BANGLADESH SOUGHT AN END TO GREAT POWER RIVALRY AND WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SEE THE AREA FREE OF DOMINATION BY ANY LITTORAL STATE "SUCH AS INDONESIA OR INDIA." BANGLADESH WANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN DECIDING ABOUT ITS FUTURE.

5. IN ANSWER TO ADM. WEISNER'S QUESTION, TABARAK SAID THE PROSPECTS FOR A REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROUPING LIKE ASEAN WERE POOR AT PRESENT BECAUSE, EXCEPT FOR INDIA, THE COUNTRIES WERE SIGNIFICANT PRODUCERS ONLY OF FOOD AND SOME RAW MATERIALS. POLITICAL RELATIONS (THOUGH IMPROVING) WERE STILL INSUFFICIENTLY DEVELOPED TO PERMIT A FORMAL GROUPING; THE AREA WAS NOT COMPARABLE TO WESTERN EUROPE, THE NATIONS OF WHICH SHARE A COMMON HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND A GENERALLY PERCEIVED THREAT.

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6. IN TABARAK'S OPINION SOVIET POLICY TOWARD BANGLADESH HAD
GENERALLY CHANGED FROM ONE OF "GREAT FRIENDSHIP" (1972
TO 1975) TO ONE WHICH, FROM MUJIB'S FALL THROUGH 1976
"BORDERED ON HOSTILITY." ALTHOUGH RELATIONS HAVE
GRADUALLY IMPROVED, THERE WAS A SETBACK AFTER THE
1977 MUTINIES WHEN THE BDG, SUSPECTING THE COMMUNIST
PARTY OF BANGLADESH OF SUPPORTING THE MUTINEERS, BANNED
IT, MAKING THE SOVIETS "ANNOYED." TABARAK, NOTING
THAT THE SOVIETS HAD APPEARED UNHAPPY ABOUT BANGLADESH'S
RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA, SAID THAT THE BDG HAD INFORMED
THE USSR THAT ITS "IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE PRC
DID NOT THREATEN LEGITIMATE SOVIET INTERESTS." IN
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AN ASIDE, TABARAK SAID THAT INDIA WAS NOW TRYING TO
INCREASE THE LEVEL OF ITS RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED

STATES WITHOUT REDUCING THE SCALE OF ITS RELATIONS
WITH THE USSR.

7. THE SOVIETS, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID, HAVE STRONG
POINTS IN INDIA AS WELL AS VIETNAM, SOUTH YEMEN,
ETHIOPIA AND ANGOLA -- THOUGH NO LONGER IN EGYPT. THE
REGIME IN WEST BENGAL WAS COMMUNIST AND "WE ARE
SOMEWHAT WORRIED ABOUT THIS." THE CPM IN WEST BENGAL
WAS TRYING TO BUILD RELATIONS WITH THE PRO-SOVIET
COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA, WHICH WOULD INCREASE
BANGLADESH'S VULNERABILITY (TO A COMMUNIST THREAT). HE
BELIEVED THE CPM, ALTHOUGH IN POWER, WAS STILL
HARD-PRESSED AND LOOKED FOR SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE WEST
BENGAL, E.G. IN BANGLADESH AND ASSAM. TABARAK WAS NOT
HAPPY, EITHER, WITH THE RECENT SUCCESS OF THE CPM IN
TRIPURA, THE INDIAN STATE WHICH BORDERS ON BANGLADESH

8. TABARAK CONCLUDED WITH A BREIF DISCUSSION OF
SE ASIA; HE CHARACTERIZED THE VIETNAMESE-CAMBODIAN
FIGHTING AS A SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT. HE HAZARDED THE GUESS
THAT CAMBODIA'S APPARENT BELLIGERENCE MIGHT STEM FROM
INTERNAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS. AS TO WHETHER VIETNAM WAS
SEEKING, OR WOULD SEEK, TO DOMINATE ALL OF INDO-CHINA
OR EVEN BEYOND, TABARAK REPLIED THAT THE VIETNAMESE
WERE SOPHISTICATED AND THE PROPRIETOR OF A LARGE,
WELL-ARMED, BATTLE-HARDENED ARMY. HE EXPRESSED REGRET
THAT BURMA HAD BEEN UNABLE TO DEVELOP ITS POTENTIAL
AND HAD REMAINED INWARD-LOOKING. IN HIS OPINION THE
SITUATION THERE WAS IMPROVING SOMEWHAT (THOUGH HE
CITED NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THAT OPINION). HE
HOPED THAT BURMA'S RELATIONS WITH THAILAND WOULD IMPROVE;
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THAT WAS THE NATURAL ROAD FOR BURMA TO FOLLOW.

9. TABARAK IS CONSERVATIVE, DISPASSIONATE, AND WELL-
INFORMED. ALTHOUGH HE OCCASIONALLY ADVERTED TO HIS VIEWS
AS PERSONAL, WE BELIEVE THEY REPRESENT, IN GENERAL,
THE VIEWS AND INTERESTS OF PRESIDENT ZIA HIMSELF ABOUT
TOPICS COVERED.
BERGESEN

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